

Radical Middle Way Transcripts

THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES

REDISCOVERING THE WAY OF
FUTUWWA, ISLAMIC CHIVALRY

9TH MAY FRIENDS
HOUSE

Mercy, service and justice is the Way of Futuwwa. Inspired by the example of Sayyidna Ali, those who followed this noble code in the past were committed to serving humanity - through discipline, strength and selflessness. In an age of anger and senseless violence, the time has come for this great tradition to be revived once more.

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Habib Ali al-Jifri on:
'Futūwwa'

[Opening Du'a]

In the name of God, The Compassionate, The Merciful, praise be to God, and blessings and peace be upon the leader of the people of chivalry, and his family and companions.

A definition of Chivalry:

It's a power or strength which is internalised, a strength which possesses insight, which is internalised and which reacts in order to give victory to truth.

I shall repeat it.

It is a power possessing insight which is internalised and reacts in order to give victory to truth.

Ikhlas is its final goal. Sincerity is its final goal. Good character is its guide. Mercy is its inward. Bringing about change is its outward. Therefore everything which does not combine all these attributes is not considered chivalry. So it's a power. In the body, and in the self, in the intellect, and in the spirit. One can sometimes be forgiven for lacking it in his body, and one can sometimes be forgiven if his self and his intellect do not have the same power as his spirit. But it's unforgivable for it not to be possessed as a power in his spirit. And whoever does not possess this power in his spirit can not possess chivalry.

It's a power that possesses insight. When the power is blind, we can never call that chivalry. It can make mistakes even though it has insight, but because it possesses insight, it can correct its own mistakes. It's internalised.

The love of demonstrating one's power has nothing to do with chivalry. Except in a situation in which one needs to bring about the victory of truth. The Prophet of Allah (saw) saw one of the companions during a battle, walking around proudly, in a way that was showing off. It was a battle to fight someone who had transgressed against them. The Prophet of God said that kind of walk is a walk that is hated by God, except in this situation, so therefore it's hidden. So how do we come to know about it if it is hidden? Because it reacts in order to give victory to truth. And when does confusion happen when people's strengths react? When a person gets confused as to when he is trying to give victory to truth, and when he is trying to give victory to his own ego.

It says in a description of the Prophet that he was never angry for himself but when someone didn't give the rights of God no one would be able to stand in front of his anger. The Prophet (saw) prayed in the basin in the area surrounding the open space surrounding the Ka'ba before he went on the migration. The disbelievers would come and harm him when he was in his prayers.

I don't know if any of our young people have heard, but he was given the strength of forty men. I talk of his physical strength. When he was in prostration some of the people who wanted to hurt him would come and throw entrails on his back – the innards of animals on his back- and he wouldn't move. Seyyida Fatima Al-Zahara would come when she was about seven or eight years old at the time, she would argue with them and she would remove the filth from his back. So she had her portion of chivalry too. This chivalrous young girl of eight, would stand in front of these strong

men, argue with them and remove what they had just done to her father. But she was not defending herself, she was defending the truth. One time they strangled him until his eyes popped up, and Seyyiduna Abu Bakr pushed them away and said to them *'Do you intend to kill a man who has just says 'my Lord is God'?'* Another time they struck him. Another time they put thorns in his way. A person who is quiet for all this period, what kind of impression do you think people would have of him? Answer me young men, young women? Someone who doesn't retaliate for all this time? We're now not talking about the messenger, but someone who the people insult, throw things at, hit and he does not retaliate. What do people think of him? Do people think he is strong?

A Bedouin Arab came to Mecca. The man had some money with the enemy of God, Abu Jahl. Abu Jahl was a strong man and he used to show himself to be courageous. He was one of the leaders of bany makhzoom, and Qureish. He walked around like a peacock. The man came to Abu Jahl, and he saw that Abu Jahl was strutting around, showing himself to be stronger than him. So the man said to him *'just give me back my money'* and Abu Jahl did not even look at him.

He then came and complained to the multiples of Qureish, that this man has taken his right. So they wanted to see something funny being played out in front of him because they used to laugh at the messenger of God (saw) when entrails and dirt would be put on him, and harm would come to him, and he would stay silent. So they wanted to have a laugh, so they said to him *'no one can make Abu Al-Hakam,'* (which is the other name for Abu Jahl; Abu Al-Hakam means Father of Wisdom, but he is the Father of Ignorance) *'no one can make him do anything except that man over there'* [pointing to the Prophet (saw) who was praying next to the Ka'ba].

The Bedouin man went up to the Prophet and he believed what they said. He mentioned it to the Messenger of God. The Messenger of God said to him, *'Did they say that to you?'* Now tie the words I've just said to you with the definition I gave you in the beginning. We said it was a strength that is hidden, possessing insight, which reacts in order to give victory to truth. So the man said, *'Yes, that is what they said.'* The Prophet got up from the place he was praying and he said, *'follow me'* and they went to the house of Abu Jahl. [*Habib Ali Jifri imitates a knock*]. He knocked the door hard. Abu Jahl opened the door; he lost his colour. The Prophet said to him *'give him back his money'* and Abu Jahl said *'right now Abu Al-Qasim.'*

Young men, Abu Jahl was one of the people who were hitting the Prophet and mocking him a few days previously. The Prophet said, *'Give him the money'* and Abu Jahl said *'I will give him the money right now Abu Al-Qasim'* and he went away and the man gave him the money. The Bedouin man didn't understand the point they were trying to play, so he went back to them and said, *'Thank you so much for telling me that!'* They said, *'What are you talking about?'* he explained that *'the man's colour changed as soon as that man went to him, and he ran to get me the money!'*

So they went to Abu Jahl and said, *'what's up with you?! We wanted to have a joke at Muhammad's expense!'* Abu Jahl said *'If you were in my position you would have done nothing but give him the money. I swear to you, I opened the door and saw Muhammad in front of me; it was as if over his shoulder there was the mouth of an animal that would devour me if I even hesitated for a minute.'*

Another time, he set off to Medina after the migration. He was sitting in his mosque in Medina. When he was in Medina there was a problem with two groups of Jews in Medina- there were a group of Jews who caused problems, intrigue and even fought with the Muslims; the other group of Jews made a pledge and kept peaceful relations with the Muslims. The Prophet, to the end of his days, kept good relations with those people and he even died with his shield ransomed to those people, as he kept good relations with them. The Jews were sitting in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, and they were making gestures to each other, winking and such like, mocking the Muslims in the process. *'Al-samm 'alayka ya Muhammad!'* Now, samm is poison. So they would say 'poison be upon you ya Muhammad' instead of saying *Salam* they would say samm. And the Prophet would say nothing but *'and upon you too'* as if he had heard them say Salam. The Prophet was patient with them one time, two times, three times and four times. Until some of them once had an illusion that they were strong and he was weak. One of them made a mistake that was to do something to insult the very religion. When it was something related to just his person, the Prophet would stay quiet. But when they made a mistake against the religion he stood there in front of them, in their neighbourhood alone. He gave them one strong sentence, *'Be scared!'* So they said to him, *'Relax Abu Al-Qasim, we are used to you being a clement and a fore bearing man.'*

Therefore you should not react unless it is to bring victory to truth. Physical strength is an important impression of one's chivalry. But it's not enough. Because if physical power isn't linked to the perception of the heart, it will digress bit by bit until it becomes an expression of transgression. And transgression has nothing to do with chivalry. 'Omar Ibn Al-Khattab was a man of chivalry. All of the companions of the Prophet were chivalrous. But in Seyyidna it was more prominent, even before Islam. Do you know why he became Muslim? A moment of chivalry. What's that moment of chivalry?

He discovered that his sister, Fatima bint Al-Khattab had become Muslim and that she was studying the Qur'an along with her husband, he was overtaken by his anger and he struck her across the face. This isn't chivalry. No one who lives the meaning of chivalry would ever lift his hand to a woman. The chivalry came after that point - when he saw the blood trickling down the cheek of the face of Seyyida Fatima bint Al-Khattab. He heard a word from her, she said *'does a man show his strength to a woman?'* and thus made him review himself and acknowledge the mistake he had made.

Like we said in the definition, it's strength or a power that has insight. Yes, it can make a mistake, but it always corrects itself. Seyyidna 'Omar fell silent. So she thought she could do something now. He then said to her *'what's this? Let me read what you are reading'*. She said *'you are dirty, you cannot touch the book.'* That was when he had hit her, and saw what he had done, he fell silent. He then said *'how can I read that book?'* *'You go and wash yourself and you can read.'* So he went and washed. Can you see the chivalry in his sister, Fatima? There is another meaning of someone with chivalry; chivalry loves chivalry and spreads chivalry. When he saw the reality of her chivalry - not physical chivalry- the real chivalry- she made him aware of an even higher standard of chivalry. She would never have been able to bring herself to say anything to him before; she would hide the scriptures of the Qur'an before. But when the courage she possessed inside, came out, it came under the influence of her chivalry. He read, and liked what he read, his heart opened to Islam, and he asked *'where is the Messenger of God?'* but she was fearful for the messenger

of God, because she still did not trust her brother. The companion, who was hiding behind a curtain with her husband because he didn't want to be seen, came out and said *'he is in Dar Al-Arqam.'*

So he went to *Dar al-Arqam* and knocked on the door. Some of the companions looked out of the window and saw 'Omar standing at the door. Seyyidna 'Omar used to harm the weak Sahaba that became Muslim. He did not like anyone declaring their Islam in front of him. So they feared for the Prophet of God and said *'Oh Messenger of God, 'Omar is at the door!'* and the Prophet said *'Open the door.'*

'But it's 'Omar!'

'Let it be 'Omar. Open the door'

When they opened the door, Seyyidna 'Omar entered, and the Prophet of God grabbed his garment. Omar said that at that moment he felt like a little boy in the group of a big man. The prophet of God said to him, *'Oh 'Omar, isn't it time for your heart to believe?'*

Notice this - a few days before Seyyidna 'Omar used to bring harm to the Prophet of God, and he would be quiet. Like we said, chivalry is a strength that has insight. What the Prophet was doing there before Seyyidna 'Omar entered Islam, was to show the last message before he entered Islam; that Islam is a power, because 'Omar did not want to enter into something that was for weak people. So he showed him its power. He said *'I bear witness there is no god but God, and there is no divinity but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God.'* And after that Islam became manifest in Medina.

When people were harmed and the Sahaba began to migrate to Medina, they migrated in secret. Seyyidna 'Omar before he went on his hijra he encircled the Ka'ba. He went past a group of disbelievers of Qureish, who were considered big leaders. They said to him *'where are you going ibn Al-Khattab?'*

'I'm going to migrate to Medina. Whoever wants his mum to move for him, or to make his wife a widow, or to orphan his children, let him follow me.' So he walked out in open daylight, to show the power of Islam. Do you believe he is powerful?

This powerful man was made to cry by a woman, because of his chivalry. When he was walking along one night as the Khalifah of the Muslims, he would walk around to see and hear with his own eyes and ears, the state of his community. He heard children were crying and saw a fire lit in the house, and he said *'why are they crying?'* and she said *'they are hungry.'*

'Aren't you cooking for something for them? I see a fire burning in the house.'

'No, there's no food in there. There are just some stones I've put in boiling water and I keep turning the pot so the children think I'm cooking something until they fall asleep. They will sleep hungry, and God will ask 'Omar about this.'

Unbeknown to her, it was 'Omar she was talking to. So he said *'what does it have to do with 'Omar? Had he known you were hungry he would have given you*

something.’ She said *‘how can he govern the Muslims and he not know this is their condition?’* ‘Omar didn’t even respond to her. He left and went to the Treasury of the Muslims, and carried a bag of grain to her house. Some of the companions ran to him and said *‘shall I help you?’* and he said *‘leave me alone’* with tears running down his face. *‘You will not be able to carry my sins for me on the day of judgement.’* Seyyidna ‘Omar went into the house and with his own hands started to cook the food for her. The smoke from the food pervaded through his beard, and his tears drenched it also. He was saying to himself, *‘Oh God of ‘Omar, do not burn this white hairs in the fire of hell.’*

Chivalry in its essence is to cultivate this Earth by being the representative of God on this Earth. One of the meanings of it is to preserve life, not to end life, except in dire necessity. This was manifested by a woman who had chivalry; one of the Ansar, the wife of ‘Omar Ibn Jumuh.

In the battle of Uhud, the disbelievers were directing their main efforts against the Prophet of God himself. They were aiming their arrows straight at him. She was seen to put her shoulder and her arm out, to take the arrows instead of the Prophet (saw). So her chivalry was in the protection of the life of the Prophet.

Futuwwa is to cultivate the Earth.

When these strong companions migrated from Mecca to Medina, some of them even worked as farmers on the land; some of them worked as traders buying and selling; some of them worked as carpenters; some of them worked as iron mongers, all to cultivate the Earth. Futuwwa necessitates mercy. Whoever does not have mercy in his heart has no chivalry in his heart. Futuwwa is the ability to make a distinction between a decision made for the self, and a decision made in the self for the sake of manifesting truth on the Earth.

I will finish with two words because time is upon us.

First, futuwwa’s place is inside you, not outside. Do you know where it dwells? It resides in that point in time when you can say to yourself, *‘no’*. Every time you are able to respond with *‘no’* to your ego, when the time comes to say no to your ego, you will be a man who possesses chivalry. Imagine yourself to be like another person in front of you who is wrestling with you. In everything it wants of all its lusts and desires. If it beats you, you’ve been defeated by it. If you overcome it, then you defeat it, and you are a possessor of chivalry. That’s why the Prophet of God said, the strong man is not the one who can overcome another when he wrestles him; a strong man who can overcome himself when he is angry. How many times are you able to beat yourself when you are angry and how many times has your anger overcome you? Who can do a training programme for himself and wrestle with his own ego. It’s a decision you can leave this meeting with.

Imagine yourself as the wooden dummy or punch bag they use for training, and see how much you can beat it. Or imagine it to be another fighter in front of you. And you’ll find that sometimes your ego beats you, no problem. But don’t let it beat you every time otherwise you will become weak. When fajr comes, you know that fajr has come upon you, and your ego says, *‘Oh I’m tired, I stayed up late, let’s sleep’*. Are you one of those people that say, *‘ok let’s go to sleep?’* You are weak. You have been

beaten in that round. Say to it, *'no no no, get up and pray'*. But it says, *'no I want to sleep. Prayer is nice. No sleep.'*

'If you just get up and do wudthu and pray...'

'What's up with you, you want to sleep or what??'

Who's going to beat who?

Walk in a street, someone eggs you on and says, *'oh you're just a weakling, you can't fight. You're just a coward, you can't steal'. If you're man, take some of this, try it. Try these drugs. Go on. Try it.'* Where's the man there? Your ego starts saying *'go on, show him you're a man'* but is chivalry to prove to others you are a man? Or to prove to yourself you are a man. Or is a woman's chivalry to prove to herself she is chivalrous?

The last point.

Take the definition you were given about chivalry, and study the biography of the Prophet of God. Read it one, two, three, four, five times - read it several times even. From the first time you read, every time you see a situation where you think the Prophet showed chivalry, write it. Make a note. Look at how many situations there are in which you can see chivalry. If you do it properly by the time you've read it seven times, you'll find ten more situations than you found the first time. Do the same for the biographies of the Prophet's companions and his family. And do the same for the biographies of the Imams, Abu Hanifah rahimu Allah.

Abu Hanifah used to live next to a neighbour, who would wait for Abu Hanifah's (radhi Allahu 'anhu) companions to sit together for a lesson, and then he would pull out the lute and start playing it loudly. He had an irritating voice as well, and yet he used to think his voice as so beautiful and chivalrous. He used to say things about how much of a Knight he was, how gallant he was, and that the day they would fight he would be at the front line with them. The students, whilst listening to this, became irritated. They would say to the Imam, *'go to your neighbour and complain about him.'* And the Imam would say, *'he is my neighbour.'* They said, *'ok, you don't have to do anything. You give us permission and we will go over there and hit him, and show him his place.'* He replied, *'no, he is my neighbour.'*

One night, they couldn't hear him, it was all quiet. During the lesson the Imam stopped having realised he couldn't hear the man's voice. He said *'what happened to the man they missed out on in the battle lines?'* The students starting laughing, to which he said *'what's up with you?'* *'Oh, God made him rest for you... the police men put him in prison.'* So Abu Hanifah got up and left the lesson. He said *'he is my neighbour. I must intercede on his behalf.'* He went to the Khalifah's residence and knocked on the door. This shows the strength of Abu Hanifah; he went straight to and the Khalifah and not the police over his grievance. The ruler's doorman said *'who is it?'* The doorman opens the door and says *'what do you want?'*

'I want to speak to the Khalifah.'

'He's asleep.'

'Wake him up for me.'

The doorman went to the Khalifah's room, woke him up and said to him *'someone is at the door'*.

The Khalifah said *'who is it?'*

He said *'Abu Hanifah.'*

'Are you mad??! Abu Hanifah doesn't come during the daytime, you're telling me he has come in the middle of the night? He only comes when we have to request for him. Give me a moment; let me put my clothes on.'

He came to the door and said *'Imam Abu Hanifah, what do you want?'*

'I hear my neighbour is in prison. If he is being unjustly treated, I want him released right now. And if he has done something to someone, I will pay for it on his behalf.'

Look at the kind of chivalry Imam Abu Hanifah possessed. He was above going to the ruler for worldly, petty things. He only went to help people.

It's more chivalrous to pull out your British passport when someone is mistreating you and to say *'I'm British, you can't do anything. Give me my rights'*? And when it's time to give your dues, you say *'oh, it's nothing to do with me, I'm Muslim'*?

The Caliph said to him *'Ok, let us leave it until tomorrow and I will get him out.'*

The Imam said *'No, now.'*

And they released him.

Imam Abu Hanifah was walking in front and the man behind him. And Abu Hanifah started singing the same song that the man used to sing, in the same voice, *'#...They lost me at the battle line, I was at the frontline with them, and they forgot me behind...#'*

The man started crying, saying *'I am the one who lost myself, oh Imam.'*

That man became one of the great scholars of Islam, and a student of Abu Hanifah.

Do you know why I have told you this story?

When you read the biography of the Prophet and the Companions of the Prophet, you will see that distillation of chivalry is when a man introduces a change in his society, for the better. And the one, who cannot bring a change for the better of himself or his society, is not one of chivalry.

The chivalry of Abu Hanifah was able to change that drunkard man who used to stay up at night singing, into a man of greatness.

The chivalry of the master of creation, Seyyidna Muhammad (saw), after 1400 years, is remembered in London. It's changed the lives of 1.3 billion people on the Earth. This is the same man who was satiated with bread two days in a row.

I hope that each of you read the biography and the biography of the righteous people, and look at himself and say what changes do I need to bring about in myself to make me a better person, and make the people around me better people. He'll discover the secret is in the loftiness of one's aspiration. These are keys, as they say. Maybe if God prolongs our lives, we can do a three day course on futuwwa.

[Closing du'a followed by Al-Fatiha]

About Habib Ali al-Jifri

Habib 'Ali Zain Al Abideen Al Jifri was born into a family of noble lineage extending in an unbroken chain to Imam Husayn (ra), the grandson of the Prophet (saw). Habib 'Ali is from the majestic city of Tarim, South Yemen. Nestled in the ancient valley of Hadramawt, Tarim has been a center of learning and spirituality for centuries. Habib 'Ali received a classical Islamic education from the illustrious scholars of Hadramawt, embodying a methodology which crystallizes the middle way of Islam, Islamic Jurisprudence, a respect for the differences between jurists and a spiritual education drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Habib 'Ali is Founder of the 'Taba Foundation for Islamic Studies and Research' based in the United Arab Emirates. He is also a lecturer at Dar Al Mustafa, Tarim, an educational institute established for the study of traditional Islamic sciences. Habib 'Ali is continually invited to lecture in many countries across the globe and appears regularly on a variety network television and radio programs.

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